

Edna the Inn Woman

Edna sits outside buildings where there is a bench. She shouts at passing traffic. People say she used to be a nun but she looks like a librarian from the 1950s. She continues sitting there and shouting at traffic even when it rains or snows. She shouts complex number sequences and accusations of various crimes and misdoings. She is everyone's judge and jury.

Edna sometimes calls herself "Nancy Raygun" and laughs at her own joke. Sometimes people believe her and call her "Nancy" and that makes her laugh again.

Edna is well known in Exeter. They call her the "Inn Woman" because she gets in everywhere including, of course, all of the inns and pubs.

She is in a world of her own and no-one else can know all of the places she goes.

She has been reported for all sorts of things, some of which are impossible. She has been reported for appearing out of nowhere and disappearing to somewhere else. She laughs a lot. Sometimes she cries. She tells stories. She remembers lovers. She remembers wars, some of which happened before she was born.

She is not mad. She has been tested for that and the psychiatrists who tested her declared that Edna was "saner than most of us". And then they laugh and laugh.

She walks the streets of Exeter and knows places that other people have forgotten.

They say that Edna was once a solicitor at the bar but no-one can say whether she was a member of the Middle Temple, the Inner Temple, Lincoln's Inn or Gray's Inn.

When asked about it she might say that it was many years since she had "solicited at a bar".

She winks and strokes her hair saying "Gray's Inn? I 'spec tis. Licorne's Inn? Are you sure? Julian Temple? Didn't he make a video about the missing ten days of the year? Chaos! We never know what's going to happen during those ten days. I quite like it!"

She slips in and out of theatrical West Country dialect and is perfectly capable of speaking like a learned barrister. She is always as sober as a judge.

For a person who spends a lot of time in pubs it is remarkable that Edna never seems to be inebriated. There is never any odour of drink about her and her physical movements are never clumsy, never staggering or swaying. Her eyes are clear and she appears to be permanently sober. Nevertheless there is a strangeness about Edna and everybody notices. Edna likes to pretend she has lived for hundreds or even thousands of years but she hasn't. She also likes to pretend that she is a time traveller who passes through time portals. Maybe it's true. Maybe she does. It is certainly interesting that she still refers to the Bartholomew Street and Friernhay Street area as "Little Britayne" which is what its name was up until 1636 when a new church yard was consecrated there to Saint Bartholomew.

The old name "Little Britayne" referred to what was basically a ghetto. A district where the ancient Britons lived as an underclass dominated by the laws and the ways of the surrounding victorious Saxon invaders.

Why does Edna speak of Little Britayne as if it were still current? And, for that matter, why does she speak of the now vanished church of "All Hallows on the Wall" as if that were still part of Saint Bartholomew's churchyard? Why does she refer in the present tense to the Greyfriars monks and the catacombs and the cholera epidemic and even the corset making team who used the church to make parachutes during World War Two?

Edna sometimes calls the Heavitree district of Exeter "The Head Tree", a reference to Heavitree's history as a place of execution. The place, in fact, where the last English execution of alleged witches took place in 1682.

Either she is playing up to the rumours of her magic powers or she really does have some arcane ability to walk between the centuries.

Predictably Edna was unimpressed by the news in the early 2020's that Exeter's "Jury Inn" was to be rebranded as a "Leonardo Hotel". "They don't know Leonardo the way I know Leonardo!" she claimed, before lapsing into an enigmatic smile.

Edna is often seen passing through Maddocks Gate by Maddocks Row or cruising along Gandy Street like a ghost.

When speaking about old lovers she often mentions an ex-military man whom she calls "The Colonel of Delight". With a faraway look in her twinkling eyes she says that she knew him "down Starcross".

There have been many rumours "heard" about Edna. Among these rumours is a story that the police once detailed two plainclothes detectives to follow Edna and report back on all the places she frequents. It is said that these two detectives were never heard from again.

Confronted by a group of witch costumed children in Heavitree on Halloween Edna shouted at them "What are you lot doing HANGING AROUND?"

She then apologised for scaring them and said it was only a joke and they all looked "lovely and good enough to eat".

When one little girl boldly said to Edna "We're all witches and I think that YOU are a witch too!" Edna replied "Don't make allegations. If you make allegations you turn into an alligator and if you sue you turn into a sewer. So if you make allegations AND you sue what are you then?"

After a moment's doubt the courageous little girl replied "An alligator in a sewer!"

"That's right!" said Edna.

Edna was once found crying unconsolably at the corner of the Guildhall's new Trichay Street (near where the old Trichay Street was) and Waterbeer Street. She sobbed that she was crying for her babies. Later she told people that she had said it wrong and that the babies were someone else's. Apparently either "Lorelei the Mermaid's" or "The River Woman's" according to various rumoured accounts of the distressing conversation.

Usually a bright and happy person Edna occasionally has powerful moods swings to anger or tears.

Edna once burst into tears while attending a lecture on Environmental DNA.

She had noticed the poster advertising the lecture because they had written environmental DNA as "eDNA". This made Edna curious and she felt she had to attend but, upon hearing the lecturer say that the DNA of species only remained in the water for a short time, Edna began to cry.